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# LŪ SIPI: A MARKER OF TONGAN DISTINCTION

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**ABSTRACT:** In Tonga, traditional dishes like lū sipi—lamb or mutton drenched in coconut cream and baked in taro leaves—play a crucial role in sustaining cultural norms, affirming place and constructing identity. Consequently, lū sipi illuminates daily routines and the significance of being and becoming Tongan. For Tongans abroad, lū sipi provokes island memories and nostalgia. Considering lū sipi’s importance both in Tonga and in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, this paper explores lū sipi as a marker of Tongan distinction, using qualitative description, talanoa ‘Pasifika research methodology’ and thematic analysis. We interviewed two self-identifying Tongans and an academic expert on South Pacific Island culture, all based in Auckland. Their expertise and experiences, within our explorative research, provided a platform to understand lū sipi within Tongan culture, particularly its symbolic and actant properties. What our research reveals is that, despite its Tongan distinction, lū sipi reflects the dynamic nature of cultural change around food over both time and place. Within these considerations, our research explores the dynamic nature of food as an expression not only of the Tongan diaspora but of the dynamics of contemporary Tongan identity.

*Keywords:* lū sipi, Tongan identity, Tongan diaspora, food sharing, commensality, talanoa, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Food and identity are linked domains. Brillat-Savarin ([1825] 2003), the godfather of gastronomy, recognised this in his oft-quoted aphorism, “Tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are” (p. 22). Additionally, for Woodward (2007), food holds actancy. Within that notion people imbue food with meanings and emotions over and above its basic nutritional benefits. The Tongan dish *lū sipi* ‘lamb or mutton wrapped in taro leaves’ provides a unique way in which to research those domains.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this explorative qualitative research paper considers the significance of lū sipi for Tongans in Tonga and in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Specifically, we illuminate how food change reflects not only new food norms but also concepts of being and becoming Tongan within considerations of time and place.

To understand the significance of *lū sipi*, our paper is structured in the following way. Firstly, we introduce *lū sipi*. Then, we consider recent and historically important research on the topic of food and identity and in particular studies related to Tongan foods. Those considerations lead into our conceptual framework and methodology. Following that, we present and introduce our three participants. Finally, we present our research findings, discussion and conclusion.

#### INTRODUCING LŪ SIFI

*Lū sipi* is made of *lū* ‘taro’ leaves that are wrapped around pieces of *sipi* ‘lamb or mutton’, with onions and sometimes tomatoes added, and then drenched and steamed/stewed in coconut cream (Fig. 1).

In Tonga, a traditional *lū sipi* is cooked in an *umu* ‘earth oven’. However, in Auckland, many Tongans cook *lū sipi* in an electric oven and using convenience products such as canned coconut cream. Capozza (2003) and Oliver *et al.* (2010) noted that *lū sipi* is predominantly known as a Tongan dish, despite its prevalence in other Pacific Island regions as well. For many Tongans living in Tonga and in Aotearoa New Zealand, *lū sipi* is a favourite meal. As Fekete (2014) suggested, it connects the meanings and emotions shared between individuals and groups that help to explain how traditional foods come to represent people. In this way, *lū sipi* is also an actant (Woodward 2007), reflecting and incorporating aspects of Tongan identity, culture, memory and nostalgia, in the same ways that *faikava* ‘the preparation and ceremonial consumption of kava’ serves as a marker of identity, particularly for young Tongan males born and raised in Auckland (Fehoko 2014).

#### BACKGROUND

Pacific Island cultures and cuisines, while distinct, are interrelated. One way to gain insight into them is through the understanding of Pacific Island cookbooks. As Haden (2009) observed, “there have been very few Pacific-themed cookbooks of any authentic quality published [thus far]” (p. xv). Haden attributed that failure to the propensity of such cookbooks to feature cocktails and beach parties, themes that, he proposed, reflected the tourist imagination, not Pacific cuisine. Additionally, Haden claimed that the cuisines of the Pacific were ignored because of the dominating influence of western food culture within Pacific nations. Oliver *et al.* (2010) further observed that many Tongan traditions and customs were dying out because of western influence. These authors note that the introduction of many western foods, including cabin crackers, noodles, imported meats (including mutton flaps and turkey tails) and junk food, have contributed to a health crisis for many Pacific Island nations. It could be argued that the Pacific Islands have become a dumping ground for foods that are regarded as



Figure 1. Lū sipi: (top left) ingredients; (top right) portions; (middle left) with coconut cream; (middle right) wrapped in foil; (bottom) cooked and ready to eat. Photographs by E. Toloke, 2020.

seconds in neighbouring countries like New Zealand and Australia (Gewertz and Errington 2010). One outcome is that despite their high fat content and negative health impacts, lamb flaps are now considered “good eating” in many islands and have made their way into traditional dishes, as for example *lū sipi* (Capozza 2003). Notwithstanding health considerations, the views of Haden (2009) and Oliver *et al.* (2010) suggest that a lacuna exists within the literature in terms of Tongan and other Pacific cuisines, communities and cultures. In an effort to help fill that gap, our research contributes valuable and unique insights into *lū sipi*, a dish that is enjoyed by many Tongans.

As Brillat-Savarin’s ([1825] 2003) aphorism alludes, food is a potent identifier. Many cultural groups construct their national identity through food. In this way, many foods sit within Billig’s (1995) construct of “banal nationalism”. Billig proposed that national identity is overtly and covertly supported by the concept of the banal and unquestioned acceptance of material items, like food, and their unquestioned association with national identity. Exemplifying Billig’s theme are associations between food and nation that are regularly taken for granted. Supporting that position is Kincheloe’s (2002) observation that McDonald’s has become a beacon of aspirant, globalised and Americanised consumption. In similar ways, we propose that *lū sipi* has undergone similar symbolic and material dynamics reflecting Oliver *et al.*’s (2010) realisation of how dominating cultures, through food, can come to politically dominate indigenous and minority peoples.

However, like identity, all cuisines are dynamically constructed. Reflecting that, Yamamoto (2017) claimed that New Zealand’s cuisine belonged to its migrants. Yet, before settler immigration, indigenous Māori cuisine was Aotearoa’s norm. As Pollock (2017) realised, Māori ancestors brought their food crops and other staple items with them from central East Polynesia. In combination with adaptations to New Zealand’s flora and fauna, Māori cuisine evolved to include a rich array of seafoods (*kai moana*), freshwater fish and eels, and native fungi, berries and nuts (Morris 2010). Traditional Māori cuisine changed after western contact, being influenced by a range of new ingredients, but some favoured foods persisted and are still important today.

Best exemplifying how Māori food changed under the influence of settler colonists and newly introduced ingredients is the way in which Māori adapted a dietary staple made from pollen of the *raupō* ‘bulrush’ (*Typha orientalis*): Māori bread, or *parāoa rēwena*, morphed from its authentic form, known as *pungapunga*, into a wheat-based form that is a popular speciality item today (Royal and Kaka-Scott 2014).

These considerations suggest that New Zealand’s contemporary national cuisine holds a blended origin within the cuisines of indigenous Māori and Pākehā ‘European settler colonists’. Yet, that view is a simplistic one.

Contributing to the discussion on the lack of an identifiable New Zealand or “Kiwi” cuisine and drawing on the work of Hage (1998), Harbottle (2000) and Heldke (2003), Morris (2010) observed that the acceptance by a dominant culture of the food of any minority group represents a metaphoric acceptance of that minority. For Morris, Māori food was not acceptable to Pākehā because Māori, consequent to their political activism, had a “spoilt identity” (p. 24) for many Pākehā. Consequently, Māori food was not acceptable within a Pākehā-dominant socio-cultural context. In these ways, Morris realised the political nature of food in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore, taking into consideration ideas about food and identity, and cognisant of Morris’s position, it is unsurprising that the construction of a Kiwi/New Zealand cuisine remains a problematic work in progress.

As Haden (2009) observed, Tongan cuisine typically consists of fresh fruits, vegetables, taro, ‘*ufi* ‘yams’, taro leaves, fish and coconuts. Historically, in Tonga, fish was eaten more often than red meat because in general terms, red meat is a post-contact food item. However, as Oliver *et al.* (2010) observed, red meat in contemporary Tongan culture is rarely eaten during the week, but rather reserved for Sunday feasting. Oliver *et al.* (2010) cited two reasons for this: red meat’s scarcity and its cost. Yet, as Haden and Oliver *et al.* realised, food in Tonga is linked to more than nutrition. As Haden suggested, food in Tonga reflects socio-cultural norms, respect, wealth, social status and hospitality. For Oliver *et al.* (2010), the agency of Tongan food reflected the relationship between the Tongan people and their land. That relationship is an important one since, as Haden observed, Tongan people depend on the land for basic resources and food. Reflecting that relationship, Tongan food is not a random selection of ingredients but rather a vehicle for Tongan culture and social connections. In that way, land in Tonga could be considered a treasure because it provides for the needs of Tongan people.

Tongan food symbolises the past by connecting Tongans to their ancestors through its preparation, consumption and sharing (Fekete 2014). According to Pollock (1992) and Tu’inukuafe (2019), food is the centrepiece of communal Tongan celebrations. In Tongan culture, constructs of family and social hierarchy are evidenced through food and, according to Bott (1981) and Fehoko (2014), denote hierarchies of being and becoming Tongan. Exemplifying that, within a Tongan household, the father holds the highest rank, and in recognition of that, food is usually served to him and to any elderly people first (Bott 1981). Yet the father’s paramount status is contested. Reflecting that are considerations of the *fahu* ‘father’s eldest sister’. Kaeppler (1999) explains that *fahu* is an important concept in Tongan social relations. The concept of *fahu* derives from the Tongan social principle that sisters outrank their brothers and that the *fahu*’s children hold rank over

her brothers' children. According to Bott (1981) the fahu holds the highest status. At celebrations, including birthdays, the fahu is usually seated at the front table. There, she is presented with cakes, gifts, money and sometimes the finest of mats (Bleakley 2002). According to Bott (1981), the fahu has "ritual mystical powers" (p. 18) over her brother's children. Consequently, in both informal and formal social situations, the fahu acts as matriarch. In those ways, the fahu is recognised, respected and honoured.

Although a father holds the highest rank within his household, when his sister is present, regardless of her age, she ranks higher than him. The children of the fahu and the *mehikitanga* 'a male's other sisters' also rank higher than the brothers' children (Kaepler 1971). Consequently, it is within those considerations that the hierarchy of Tongan culture can be considered to be contested.

While contested, these hierarchies reflect a wider Tongan social pyramid (Fig. 2). That pyramid has the Tongan royal family at its apex. 'Ahio (2011) explains that traditional Tongan foods hold royal associations. Historically, royal foods were prestigious meals and products that non-royal Tongans were forbidden to consume. However, non-royal Tongans were permitted to grow the ingredients for those products for the royal household (Oliver *et al.*

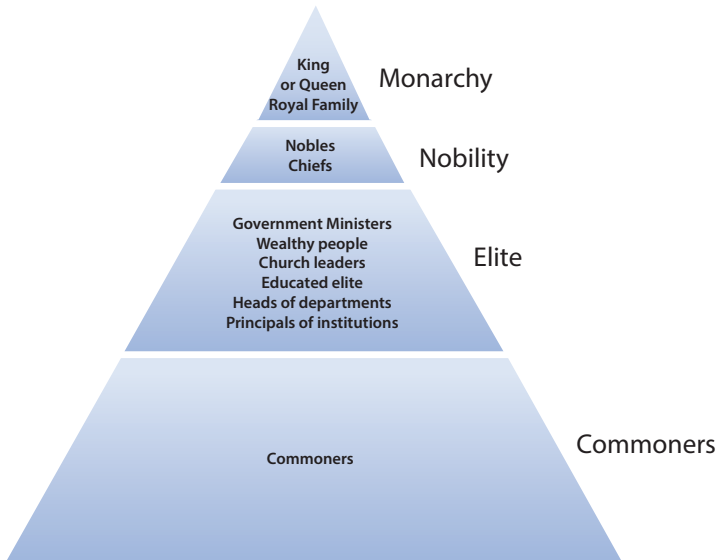


Figure 2. The Tongan social hierarchy. From Kalavite (2010).

2010). According to Tu'inukuafe (2019), royal foods included *tunu puaka* 'roasted pig', 'ufi and some seafoods. The royal food hierarchy lasted until 1875, when King George Tupou I eliminated the class system (Tu'inukuafe 2019). That change allowed the people of Tonga to grow and consume "royal food". Consequently, royal foods such as 'ufi and tunu puaka came to represent wealth and prestige. *Puaka* 'pig' sits at the apex of the Tongan protein hierarchy and is the ultimate symbol of wealth in Tongan feasts, festivals and rituals (Tregus 2010).

As Gifford (1929) explained, ancestral Tongans sacrificed puaka to please the gods. Beaglehole and Beaglehole ([1938] 1971) proposed that pigs were key to understanding and appreciating Tonga's indigenous economy. Furthermore, these authors observed that preparing and cooking a tunu puaka was a male-dominated activity symbolising masculinity and the ability of Tongan men to provide for others.

Today, while still considered prestigious, puaka is commonly consumed as a part of contemporary Tongan food culture (Tu'inukuafe 2019). In concluding our background discussion, we note that several themes have emerged as being important within Tongan culture. These include considerations of history, the remembering of ancestors, the importance of the royal family, and how a hierarchy of being and becoming Tongan is evidenced in contemporary and everyday Tongan life. Consequently, exploring lū sipi not only considers these domains but also provides rich research data illuminating the material importance of food within Tongan society and culture, both in Tonga and in Auckland.

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

We approached our research using a qualitative descriptive paradigm (Sandelowski 2000) and a constructionist world view (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Blumer 1969; Mead 1934). Those positions are complementary. Sandelowski's qualitative description emphasises the world view and voice of participants while a constructionist world view avers that people create their own worlds in order to understand and negotiate them. Within that amalgam, and in consideration of our participants' subjective experiences and notions of objects as social actants (Woodward 2007), we recognised Blumer's (1969) position that:

- (1) individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them, (2) interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situations, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings, (3) meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society, and (4) meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others. (p. 932)



We interviewed our three participants for approximately one and a half hours each. We recorded and then transcribed our interviews. From that process we distilled our data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Guest *et al.* 2012; Vaismoradi *et al.* 2013). Key to our use of this technique were the themes that emerged from our participants' narratives. Those themes formed the base of our research findings.

Transcending our method was our use of *talanoa* 'extended conversation' within our open-ended conversations with our participants. According to Vaioleti (2006), *talanoa* is delineated within considerations of *tala* 'to tell' and *noa* 'without concealment' (p. 1). Vaioleti indicates that in essence *talanoa* refers to the talking around the intended topic within wider conversations that eventually get to the intended topic. However, and within that consideration, Vaioleti proposes that *talanoa*'s effectiveness in research could be compromised by issues of validity. Yet, as Vaioleti also observed, validity denotes the socio-temporal positioning of participants not only within researcher use of *talanoa* but within almost all qualitative methodologies.

*Talanoa* promotes conversations that include storytelling and/or gossiping (Fehoko 2014). Consequently, as researchers we fostered generalised yet meaningful conversations with our participants, rather than beginning our relationship with them in conversations about our research. In that way, our participant relationships were initially about relationship building. From that relationship we then introduced our research in gradual conversations. Our approach reflected Prescott's (2008) suggestion that *talanoa* promotes relationship building between participants and researchers. Additionally, our use of *talanoa* reflected Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba's (2014) key recommendation that generalised conversations precede focus upon the research topic. While the *talanoa* approach extended the length of our conversation times with participants, it provided greater depth and understanding about *lū sipi* and its place on Tongan culture. Table 1 details our participants and their areas of expertise.

Table 1. Participants and their areas of expertise.

Participant	Area of expertise	Age	Gender
Soane Pasi	Chef, Tongan	44	Male
Associate Professor Tracy Bero	Pasifika-specialist academic, non-Tongan	57	Female
'Amanaki Toloke	Keen home cook, Tongan	54	Male

Our participant blend facilitated both an “emic” and “etic” (Jary and Jary 2000: 182) research perspective that generated meaningful understandings of *lū sipi*. Our realisations of emic and etic straddled the internal dialogue of being Tongan, with the external realities that our participants faced as Tongans living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, and in consideration of the explorative nature of our research, we believed that our three participants, within their varied backgrounds, provided for our research a unique and valuable insight into *lū sipi*. Our research and participant narratives provide a starting point for future research exploring *lū sipi* and Tongan food culture. Additionally, we note that one of our participants, ‘Amanaki Toloke, is the father of one of our paper’s authors. That relationship benefitted our research in multiple ways. For our second author, his input realised a way in which she came to a deeper understanding and appreciation of her own Tonganness. While those realisations sit outside the scope of our paper, they reflect in meaningful ways how research work impacts researchers in both personal and positive ways.

#### FINDINGS

Our talanoa, transcription and thematic analysis yielded nine sub-themes that we grouped into three primary themes (see Table 2). Herein we sequentially work through those themes, illuminating them with participant commentary.

Table 2: Nine sub-themes grouped into three primary themes.

Primary theme	Sub-themes
Identity	Family values Memories Ways of life
Metaphor for being Tongan	History Tradition Social ranking
Tongan food culture	Commensality Delicacy Contemporary cuisine

#### *Identity: Family Values, Memories and Way of Life*

Our participants connected *lū sipi* with Tongan identity. This was evidenced within their considerations of family values, memories and ways of life.

Inherent to those themes were feelings of belonging and togetherness highlighted by the presence of family and friends. As Associate Prof. Berno remarked:

*So palusami* [Fijian term for *lū sipi*] and the whole *umu/lovo* [Tongan/Fijian for ‘earth oven’] thing reminds me of those days with the gang. It is nostalgic, happy memories with friends and community. It is sort of, people outside of the Pacific think of it just PIs [Pacific Islanders]. They don’t realise that there is a lot of different blood in the Pacific and it reminds me of that, the intermingling of the cultures, and everyone is into it. So, it has a lot of good memories for me.

Echoing that, but within the family setting, Soane remembered that “in Tonga, *lū sipi* is a family deal—everyone is into it.” ‘Amanaki added his childhood experiences in Tonga: “When you’re a kid the best memories are with *lū sipi*. Not only is it about the taste but I remember all the good times and who my friends were at the time.” Soane remarked:

*Lū sipi* doesn’t just bring togetherness but connects you with others that crave and love *lū sipi*. Let’s face it, in Tonga we are still in some way making food like how our ancestors did in the olden days.

In those ways, our participants agreed, *lū sipi*’s preparation and consumption was characterised by ideas of sharing and togetherness. Adding to these ideas were their considerations of how *lū sipi* spanned their past and present experiences. For them *lū sipi* was dynamic. Yet, *lū sipi* was firmly grounded in memory, nostalgia and history. Reflecting that, ‘Amanaki associated *lū sipi* with his father, Solomone Toloke:

I associate *lū sipi* with the memory of my dad. The way my dad cooks the *lū sipi*. When we start the fire in the *umu* then he would barbecue the *sipi* on the *umu*. So he barbecues the *sipi* and then he cuts it, then puts it in the *lū*.

Similarly, Soane reminisced how his “grandma craved for *lū sipi* at a very old age. We would take food to her wherever she was. It is common to all Tongans to make *lū sipi* on Sunday afternoons.” Soane’s link between *lū sipi* and Sundays was echoed by our other participants, as ‘Amanaki shared: “At boarding school in Tonga, Sunday is the best day for all students at the school. Why? Because on Sundays they allow our parents to bring food. Most parents bring *lū sipi*. Every household in Tonga, after church on Sunday they have *lū sipi* for their meal.”

Consequently, *lū sipi* was realised in holistic and dynamic ways. ‘Amanaki commented:

Lū sipi in Tonga is a way of life. Lū sipi connects with Tonga. So, to me lū sipi is a way of living. It ties up to family values and culture. For example, I can read something about cheese in Italy and that in some way view their culture. So, to me, lū sipi is a way of life or a style that ties up with the family and generation. My grandparents, but as far as I remember, my grandparents prepared lū sipi the same.

Unsurprisingly, Soane remarked that “lū sipi just helps me understand Tongans’ way of life, especially when gathering foods and also the making of it, like when we do an umu.” Thus, lū sipi conveyed family feelings of sharing and care that, on Sundays, transcended the distance of boarding school. Those emotions were bound up with wider considerations of family history. Consequently, in ways that ‘Amanaki and Soane illuminated, lū sipi can be viewed as a metaphorical lens focusing on notions of knowledge and history reflecting the Tongan way of life, particularly considerations of family values and culture that reflect cultural characteristics of caring and sharing. While Soane reflected on the meaning of lū sipi in Tonga, ‘Amanaki commented on lū sipi in New Zealand. He recounted:

In Tonga, there are so many things you need to do and gather to make lū. The only thing you buy is the sipi. Also, in Tonga we cook under ground, so the weather plays a part in making lū. In New Zealand, when using an [electric] oven, it is the same from January to December—there is no change. All ingredients are bought from the shop, and you use a commercial oven.

For ‘Amanaki and Soane, lū sipi was part of the Tongan way of life and diaspora through the activities of gathering and preparing lū sipi. For them, those experiences changed with location. In New Zealand, things like aluminium foil and electric ovens were conveniences that made the preparation time and cooking of lū sipi shorter and less labour intensive. That contrasted with the time it took to prepare and cook lū sipi in Tonga. Aotearoa New Zealand’s comparatively unpredictable weather was another differentiating factor that was mitigated by electric ovens indoors. In contrast, an umu required a sunny day and many physical steps to prepare. Consequently, preparing and cooking lū sipi the traditional Tongan way reinforced participants’ roles and allowed time for extended conversations, gossip and bonding. In turn, these activities reinforced participants’ understandings of being and becoming Tongan in deeper ways than an Aotearoa New Zealand lū sipi experience might. As Associate Prof. Berno claimed, making an umu or palusami takes about 20 people. This suggests that lū sipi has become an integral factor reinforcing constructs of family, family values and collective themes of Tongan identity that, in turn, support memories and ideas about Tongan culinary history.

*Metaphor for Being Tongan: History, Tradition and Social Ranking*

For our participants, *lū sipi* denoted Tonganness within their considerations of becoming Tongan, specifically in connection with Tongan history, tradition and social ranking. Consequently, it became apparent that our participants perceived *lū sipi* symbolically. That perception realised *lū sipi* as an essential material marker of Tongan culture and identity in both Tonga and Aotearoa New Zealand. For our participants, those constructs were linked with the Tongan royal family. As ‘Amanaki stated, “I believe that the royals were the ones who ate *lū sipi* first. They were the only ones who had access to overseas ingredients [like lamb].” Here, ‘Amanaki identified a top-down model of taste and consumption within Tongan society and culture. ‘Amanaki further observed: “In Tongan culture there are ranks: there are the commoners or the people, the nobles, and the king.” That hierarchy was also evidenced in language, as ‘Amanaki explained in reference to the Tongan verb “to eat”:

In Tongan culture there are different words for many verbs including “eat”. A different word is used by the commoners, the nobles and for the king/royal monarch. They all interpret the same meaning, ‘put food in your mouth’ or eat. In Tongan language *kai* is the word for commoners, for nobles it is *ilo* and for the king or royalty is *taumafa*. However, they all mean the same thing.

For ‘Amanaki, that hierarchy extended to Aotearoa New Zealand. He recollected:

For example, Auckland has four main parts: Manukau, Auckland City, the North Shore, and the West. Transferring that to Tonga, we would all have a responsibility to the king. For example, let us say that the people living in Manukau would provide the royals’ seafood. Auckland City residents would have a different responsibility to the king, perhaps supplying yam. West Aucklanders might provide the king’s kava. In those ways, the commoners support the monarchy, often with food common to their regions.

Soane contributed the view that *lū sipi* “connects us to our ancestors; they have always cooked with what they have on hand.” Associate Prof. Berno described *lū sipi* as symbolically connecting Tongan people and Pacific culture to considerations of ancestors, traditions and history. As she advised:

*Lū sipi* is steeped in history, tradition and culture. It changes from family to family, village to village and country to country, but it is that common thread across the countries that is literally grounded in the ingredients because the ingredients come from the soil, sunshine, water and air.

Soane remarked that “even though sipi isn’t a food that is truly Tongan, *lū* and *niu* [‘coconut’] are the two that connects us with our ancestors because we use it today and it is something that they used back then.” Soane acknowledged that sipi is an imported product in Tonga. However, he realised that *lū* and *niu* are authentic Tongan ingredients that are used today and have been used throughout Tongan culinary and social history. Encapsulating that view, Associate Prof. Berno contributed the observation that “food is a gateway to culture.”

*Tongan Food Culture: Commensality, Delicacy and Contemporary Cuisine*  
Our participants discussed forms of commensality, ritual and delicacy related to *lū sipi*. Sharing is a seminal construct in Tongan culture. For ‘Amanaki, *lū sipi*, commensality and relaxation were synonymously linked to the Sabbath. As ‘Amanaki explained, “Every household in Tonga, culture-wise, especially on Sundays, *lū sipi* along with other foods are cooked and often shared with neighbours.” However, the rituals of sharing and preparing *lū sipi* were mediated by place. He continued by stating: “We use the banana leaves to wrap it and there is a different taste and the moist of the *lū* when you make it using more natural resources. Here in New Zealand, we use aluminium foil. Then, there is a difference in taste.” Nonetheless, whether *lū sipi* was prepared and served in Tonga or in Auckland, sharing was key to the dish’s enjoyment.

Soane and ‘Amanaki were worried that *lū sipi*’s authenticity was compromised because of the Tongan diaspora. Additionally, sipi is an introduced food in Tonga but has become Tongan as globalised forces create glocalised and contemporary food expressions of authentic and traditional fare. As Associate Prof. Berno remarked, “The meat part of *lū sipi* to me is more of a contemporary part of Pacific cuisine. That could be said for most meats within Pacific cuisines. Meat [use] is something that has evolved over time within Pacific cuisines.”

Soane and ‘Amanaki concurred, respectively noting that “we all know that sipi was brought into Tonga” and that “*siپی* was an imported food.” In that regard, while sipi is not indigenous to Tonga, it has over time become synonymous with *lū sipi*. Reflecting that view, ‘Amanaki recounted, “In my generation sipi was there but I don’t know about the generations before me.” Soane added:

In my generation sipi was the cheapest meat available in Tonga. Even though it was cheap, it tasted good. However, I was surprised when I went back to Tonga and found that the price of sipi was more expensive than chicken. I guess that’s because everybody is raving about it, so therefore it becomes more expensive, supply and demand.

\* \* \*

On the basis of the research presented here, we propose that *lū sipi* reflects Tongan national identity in ways that are congruent with Billig's (1995) banal nationalism and Corvo's (2016) link between food and cultural identity. We further link this view with two other scholarly positions. The first is Chevalier's (2018) suggestion that the ingredients people use in their preparation of cultural foods denote their self-identification. Consequently, the positions of Billig, Corvo and Chevalier resonate with Woodward's (2007) constructs of material culture and actancy because those authors identify key ways in which food holds symbolic meanings. Combined, these positions suggest that *lū sipi* is not just a dish that provides sustenance but one that reflects and incorporates wider dimensions of Tongan culture, as well as themes of identity, globalisation and glocalisation and the memories and nostalgia that many Tongans have come to associate with *lū sipi*.

In these ways, *lū sipi* provides a platform for storytelling and reminiscing within the collective nature of being and becoming Tongan. Consequently, *lū sipi* can be "read" in holistic and dynamic ways reflecting the changing identity of Tongans in Tonga and in Aotearoa New Zealand. These dynamics position *lū sipi* within notions of authenticity and tradition versus change and newness. Consequently, being and becoming Tongan has been transformed within considerations of New Zealandness. While *lū sipi* in Aotearoa New Zealand still reflects affirmations of Tonganness within notions of Tongan history, knowledge, ways of life, family values, culture, caring and sharing, these are reconstructed within considerations of climate and technology. Notwithstanding that, within *lū sipi*'s "reconstruction", Tongan identity is shaped in new ways. New Zealand's influence on *lū sipi*, considering the emphasis on convenience foods, different culinary equipment and the impact of climate, means that while *lū sipi* still brings people together (Tu'inukuafe 2019), that togetherness reflects ongoing adaption. Consequently the "etic and emic" (Jary and Jary 2000: 182) considerations of *lū sipi* are affected, because of the dish's shorter preparation and cooking time relative to location. These factors reflect that for many Tongans living in Aotearoa New Zealand, *lū sipi* connotes less sharing, less communal contact, less commensality and an erosion of the traditional roles of preparing and serving *lū sipi*. However, countering those factors are considerations that the various suburbs of Auckland could be considered to be Tongan communities that promote and contribute toward the maintenance of identity and tradition for Tongans. In those ways, *lū sipi* remains a marker of Tongan distinction reflecting how notions of globalisation and glocalisation and the dynamic nature of changing identity have impacted Tongans in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Tonga.

NOTE

1. Sāmoa and Fiji have dishes similar to lū sipi, *luau* in the former and *palusami* in the latter.

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